NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTERS

Station WOI
Ames, Iowa
March 15, 1948

To: William Levenson

From: Dick Hull

Re: Joint public sponsorship of Monday, May 3rd afternoon session at Institute for Education by Radio, Columbus, Ohio.

As you gentlemen suggested in your conference call, the following remarks are intended as a starter for the proposed session at the Ohio Institute to be sponsored jointly by AER and NAEB. Please feel free to add, subtract, and "slash" at will.

1) I think it is extremely gratifying to have this opportunity for joint cooperation in the common interest of educational radio. Monday, May 3, properly handled, could become a milestone in serious broadcasting.

2) The fact that this is the last half-day of the Institute has its positive as well as its negative side. If we regard it as a climax, and even suggest that some of our members stay over that even if necessary, and manage to attract school and university people with more than a casual interest we may be able to effect some really basic thinking in educational radio in several areas, namely:

   a) Definition of educational radio goals and objectives
   b) Better planning and organization to these ends
   c) Working systems for mutual aid (legal, financial, program, etc.)
   d) Recognition among ourselves of our very <u>real</u> strength.
   e) Ways and means to let our administrators, the radio industry, and the public know what educational radio has to offer, and <u>is offering</u>.
   f) A practical understanding by each educational station operator, each production center, each university or school radio director of <u>radio audience problems as they relate to his particular area</u>.

3) It seems to me very important this session <u>not</u> become just another section in a radio meeting. Things to be avoided are:

   a) A review of accomplishments with which we seek to impress one another.
   b) It must <u>not</u> dissipate itself into discussions of what is good and what is bad in education and in broadcasting so we get into discussions of what often are matters of good and bad taste rather than basic goals.
   c) It must above all, not end in a maze of generalities and generalizations.

4) On the positive side, it seems to me this session should accomplish several things:

   a) <u>Point out the broad goals and opportunities in the field of educational or serious radio, and the responsibility in conscience and in resource material the colleges and universities have (whether or not they admit it) to function as broadcasters, production centers, and research agencies, not merely as critics</u>.

b) Leave all present with a clear understanding the "tide has turned." Educational radio has been the step-child of American broadcasting. Of an original 200 educational stations, the number sank to a mere 30 during the depression. We are accustomed to regard ourselves as poor relations. To so regard ourselves now is merely an exhibition of inferiority feelings. Colleges, universities, and allied institutions in terms of physical resources alone, compare favorably with many corporations. As for intellectual resources, they are the fountainheads.

c) Leave the clear concept that radio as one of the mass media is only a "tool" of communication. As Lyman Bryson says, "One can communicate anything." Universities must become, not only practitioners of educational radio, but also the practical conscience of all radio, and cease being only carping critics.

d) And if this is indeed the "age of mass communication", consider where the resources of the schools should be expended in "extension education" and how most effectively. Harold Engel at WHA has pointed out no citizen blanches at the thought of several new miles of paving to simplify transportation from one city to another to help several hundred citizens per day. (Cost in Iowa - $35,000 per mile.) Yet many wince at the "cost of radio" which can serve thousands. What will you have--3 miles of paving or "several thousand miles" of serious radio, serving as many citizens?

5) Following is a statement in other words of the problem, the promise, the urgencies, and the issues. Appended is a suggested program for your editing.

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The Problem

Educational radio has been the step-child of American radio--the poor relation--the unwanted orphan--the erudite but peculiar child of electronic mass communication.

Founded in the promise of a new technology, more than 200 educational institutions in the U.S. set up transmitters, procurred broadcasting licenses and embarked on what they then thought was the "royal road to learning."

While they were pouring from the fountain of knowledge, waiting for thirty thousands to drink, that parched population was turning its attention, not to academicians of the air but to crude, loud-mouthed but popular and effective hucksters who understood the psychology of the medium, better than the professors.

Disillusioned by the cacophony in the ether and harassed by the depression of the thirties, most of these institutions followed one of three courses: (1) let their licenses lapse (2) sold their stations, or (3) were "traded" out of their wavelength by some shrewd commercial entrepreneur.

Only thirty stations managed to survive. Educational broadcasting had reached its lowest ebb. Those thirty were lucky--and tough.

Now as Siepman says, comes "radio's second chance." With the advent of 20 noncommercial FM channels serious radio has a claim staked off. It is "pay dirt" but it requires working--and intelligent working.

If the colleges and universities of the nation miss this "second chance" they will have had their last chance.

Most of the failures of the past have been due (and in this order) to several vital factors:

(a) Misunderstanding of the medium, its psychology and its audience
(b) Poor management
(c) Poor financing

The Promise

The successes that lie within our grasp mean an about-face plus realization of the fact that "in union there is strength" and even more important fact that we have for these many years been indulging ourselves in an inferiority complex that borders on a psychosis.

THE FACT IS THE COLLEGES AND THE UNIVERSITIES ARE THE SOURCE AND THE FOUNTAIN HEAD OF RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND INFORMATION IN THIS COUNTRY. THE RESOURCES OF ANY LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY--THE PHYSICAL RESOURCES ALONE--COMPARE FAVORABLY WITH MANY CORPORATIONS. BY DEFINITION WE HAVE AUTHORITY AND THAT AUTHORITY IS SOUGHT AFTER BY THE VERY BUSINESS MEN WITH WHOM IT IS SAID WE CANNOT COMPETE.

IS IT CREDIBLE THAT THE BRAINS WHICH PERFECTED THE MEANS OF UNLOCKING THE ATOM CANNOT LEARN THE FEW PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVICES WHICH RADIO DEMANDS WHEN A SELLER OF SOAP CAN MASTER THE TRICKS IN A FEW WEEKS?

DOES IT MAKE SENSE THAT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WHICH GUARD AND ADD TO THE STOREHOUSE OF MEN'S KNOWLEDGE CANNOT ADOPT FOR THEMSELVES THE SAME KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES WHICH ADVERTISING AGENCIES SEEK FROM THEIRS (THE UNIVERSITY'S) DEPARTMENTS OF PSYCHOLOGY?

GOOD MANAGEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEDIUM ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN LARGE BUDGETS. AT LEAST TWO E-A-E-B STATIONS ARE ABLE TO PRESENT UNIQUE AND SPECIAL PUBLIC SERVICE MATERIAL IN SUCH A WAY THEY ARE SERIOUS COMPETITION TO COMMERCIAL STATIONS IN THEIR AREAS.

The Urgency and the Issues

We live in a time of crisis--more acute in terms of survival--than most of us are willing to admit. The situation is indeed, as Mr. H. G. Wells once said, "A race between education and catastrophe."

We live, as Barbara Ward said at last year's Institute, at what may be the turning point in a 500 year experiment in democracy.

We must then realize, in an age of mass communication and of mass publics, that the teletype, the wireless, the movie, the press, the radio are after all ONLY TOOLS. They are devices; they are means. THEY ARE NOT ORGANISMS INTITIES IN THEMSELVES. THEY ARE NO BETTER NOR WORSE THAN THOSE WHO USE THEM. RADIO IN ITSELF IS NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD.

IF THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE COLLEGES HAVE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION AND SPECIAL SERVICES WHICH CITIZENS OF THEIR STATES AND AREAS SORELY NEED, THEY MUST SEEK WAYS AND MEANS OF EFFECTIVELY AND FREQUENTLY INFORMING THEIR PUBLICS.

RADIO IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE OF ALL DEVICES TO ACCOMPLISH THIS END.

THE EDUCATORS HAVE TOO LONG CONTENTED THEMSELVES WITH RAILINGS AND EPITHETS AGAINST THE TRIVIA OF COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS AND THE BAD TASTE OF COMMERCIAL RADIO.

THEIR CLEAR DUTY (AND A RESPONSIBILITY THEY HAVE BYPASSED) IS TO THEMSELVES UNDERTAKE THE TASK IN TWO WAYS: (1) WHENEVER POSSIBLE TO OWN AND CONTROL THEIR OWN RADIO SERVICES AND TO PRODUCE EFFECTIVE, LISTENABLE, WORTHWHILE PROGRAMS (2) TO ENCOURAGE COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS TO DO A MORE SIGNIFICANT JOB.

THE REAL ISSUE IS NOT WHAT U. S. RADIO IS DOING BADLY AND CHEAPLY.

THE REAL ISSUE IS WHAT U. S. RADIO IN GENERAL IS NOT DOING AT ALL.

Monday, May 3 OHIO INSTITUTE 2:00 PM

(Discussion jointly sponsored by NAEB and AER)

1. "SERIOUS RADIO IN AMERICA—THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE, THE UNIVERSITY, AND THE CITIZEN"

TALK 30 min. (Suggested speakers choose one for 30" as "keynoter")
George Stoddard, President, University of Illinois.
Robert Hutchins, President, Chicago University.
Major Armstrong, Columbia University.
Walter Lemmon, World Wide Broadcasting System.
John Studebaker, Office of Education.

2. PANEL 30 min. To cover such topics as: college and university resources, an educational network (transcription or FM), radio research, program and promotion, objectives, radio for special audiences, (school system stations, campus stations, regional and general audience stations, rural audience and urban audience stations, production centers)—all pointed to bringing out actual, operating, and successful projects now in existence.

Wilbur Schramm, University of Illinois might well preside.

Speakers could be selected from the following roster in terms of their specialities (Siegel and/or Armstrong on network for instance). Choose only six.

Parker Wheatley, Lowell Institute
Harry Skornia, University of Indiana
Seymour Siegel, N. Y. Municipal Broadcasting System
William Senor, University of Southern California
Allen Miller, Rockey Mountain Radio Council
George Jennings, Chicago Radio Council
M. S. Novik, Radio Consultant
Harold McCarty, University of Wisconsin
Major Armstrong, Columbia University

(Speakers should be selected for speaking skill as well as knowledge)

3. 30 min. Discussion and questions from the floor

4. 10 min. "Work of the AER Implementing Serious Radio in America"

5. 10 min. "Work of the NAEB in Implementing Serious Radio in America"

NOTE: (a) (The session could then end with members of both AER and NAEB ready to enlist members and working plans for the coming year and be prepared to give positive suggestions and advice to prospective stations operators or producers).

(b) I would favor Stoddard over Hutchins as the keynoter.

(c) The meeting is jointly "sponsored" by AER and NAEB. We should make clear our business meetings, etc. will be separate. I would, however, like to see one joint luncheon or dinner in addition to whatever we have separately. Will appreciate reactions on this.

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